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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

**A Balanced Approach: Thoughts for the Adoption of Mission Command by the Joint
Force**

by

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the
requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily
endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

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Paper Abstract

A Balanced Approach: Thoughts for the Adoption of Mission Command by the Joint Force:

As the US military prepares to face a wide array of current and future threats across multiple domains; adaptability and agility are necessary traits to counteract a globally dispersed enemy. One of the methods to introduce these traits into the joint force while operating in an uncertain environment is mission command. Despite the recent and numerous discussions on mission command this concept is not a new idea. Mission command is a decentralized form of command and control which empowers subordinates to exercise initiative in the absence of orders. Most of the literature regarding mission command pertains to its use by land forces; over ten years of war overwhelmingly fought in the land domain has encouraged that focus. In fact, the US Army adopted mission command within its doctrine some time ago. Recently, it has been emphasized as a key component of its latest doctrinal revolution: Army Doctrine 2015. However, mission command is not just a concept for land forces. It is a mindset the entire joint force must adopt. In April 2012, General Martin Dempsey, published the *Mission Command White Paper*. This document establishes the importance of mission command and directs the joint force to adopt its principles to counter threats in a complex operating environment. But while mission command already exists in a limited way within joint doctrine, should joint doctrine adapt the definition of mission command going into the future? Certain approaches to adopting mission command closely link this concept to technological applications and systems. In doing so, does this contradict the philosophical nature of mission command?

INTRODUCTION

As the US military prepares to face current and future threats across multiple domains, the manner in which an operational or joint force commander exercises C2 presents challenges. General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently published the *Mission Command White Paper*. A central theme in this document is the importance of establishing mission command throughout the joint force to enable mission accomplishment in what will remain a dynamic setting.¹ While there is much talk on the topic of mission command, certain services, specifically the US Army, has for many years made this concept a critical component of its doctrine. Evidence of this decentralized command and control method can be seen as far back as the Civil War.² However, as the British Naval hero, Horatio Nelson often exhibited; decentralization through mission command applies to all services.³ As General Dempsey emphasizes, this is a command philosophy that must be implemented by the entire joint force.⁴

Mission command is derived from the German philosophy of command called Auftragstaktik. Auftragstaktik is a philosophy, based on the theory of warfare, which decentralizes decision making and champions' initiative in subordinates to execute on the battlefield based on changing conditions.⁵ The key aspects associated with Auftragstaktik

¹ Martin E. Dempsey. "Mission Command White Paper." Washington, DC: http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/_CJCS_Mission_Command_White_Paper_2012_a.pdf April 2012, 3.

² David M. Keithly and Stephen P. Ferris. "Auftragstaktik, Or Directive Control, in Joint and Combined Operations." *Parameters* 29, no.3 (1999): 121, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/198163457?accountid=322> (accessed 14 March 2013).

³ Jim Storr. "A Command Philosophy for the Information Age: The Continuing Relevance of Mission Command." *Defence Studies* 3, no. 3 (November 2003): 121, *Military and Government Collection*, EBSCOhost.

⁴ Dempsey, "Mission Command White Paper," 8.

⁵ Eitan Shamir. "The Long and Winding Road: The US Army Managerial Approach to Command and the Adoption of Mission Command (Auftragstaktik)." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 5 (2010): 645, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/763498797?accountid=322> (accessed 14 March 2013).

are mission, intent, initiative, and the freedom to act in the absence of orders.⁶ These aspects today translate into what the military understands as mission command.

As mission command is institutionalized by the joint force careful attention to how it is defined in doctrine, and thereby understood, is critical to its proper implementation. Philosophically, mission command is the ideal framework for an operational commander to execute command and control (C2) over their subordinate units. Realistically, however, technology plays a larger and greater role in the conduct of military operations and no doubt shapes how an operational commander views C2. In fact, some argue that the recent success of the US military is closely linked to these evolving technologies.⁷

This paper will analyze current doctrinal approaches to defining mission command comparing them with the origins of this concept to provide thoughts for the joint force as this powerful concept is adopted. As mission command's implementation is realized, joint doctrine must avoid the approach of aligning mission command with technology as this will contradict the philosophical nature of this concept by implying that successful execution of mission command depends on network centric systems and tasks.

BACKGROUND

A brief discussion of mission command's origins is necessary to provide context for this paper's central argument. Mission command stems from the concept called Auftragstaktik, which formed the basis of the German Army's warfighting philosophy.⁸ Although the philosophy emerged around the 19th century, the term of Auftragstaktik was

⁶ Milan Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare* (Newport, RI: Published by the U.S. Naval War College. 2009), X-35.

⁷ Kathleen Conley. "Operationalizing Mission Command: Leveraging Theory to Achieve Capability." *JFQ: Joint Force Quarterly* no. 68 (2013 1st Quarter 2013): 32, *Military and Government Collection*, EBSCOhost

⁸ U.S. Army, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces* Field Manual (FM) 6-0 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, August 2003), 1-15.

implemented after World War II in an effort to define the German way of fighting war.⁹ The practitioners of Auftragstaktik viewed war in an exceedingly humanistic way emphasizing theory and art over structured responses.¹⁰ Successful execution relied on speed, rapid decision making, initiative, and risk taking. Commanders were expected to make decisions based on their estimate of the situation abiding within the commander's intent; indecision or awaiting guidance was not only frowned upon but considered "shameful."¹¹ The German philosophy recognized that text book solutions to difficult problems against a thinking enemy were not practical. Within Auftragstaktik, no situation in war is perfectly understood; friction and complexity are inherent characteristics.¹² The German philosophy of war was developed as a response to those realities. It is this philosophy which the US Army based the concept of modern day mission command.¹³

The US Army first introduced what would today be called mission command within doctrine in the 1980's as a response to the growing threat of the numerically superior Soviet Union. The thinking behind it was that the U.S. would face a number of threats on opposite extremes and decentralization was a critical aspect for a successful U.S. response.¹⁴ After a number of years, the Army published *Field Manual 6-0 Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces* (FM 6-0) in 2003. This publication formally imbued a decentralized C2 known as mission command. The antithesis of this concept was known as detailed command. Both concepts were understood as forms of C2 each with their own advantages

⁹ John T. Nelsen II. *Where to Go From Here? Considerations for the Formal Adoption of Auftragstaktik by the US Army* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, School of Advanced Military Studies. 1986), 2-3.

¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹¹ Ibid., 5-8.

¹² Ibid., 6.

¹³ Michael J. Gunther. *"Auftragstaktik: The Basis for Modern Day Mission Command?"* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, School of Advanced Military Studies. 2012), 14.

¹⁴ Gregory Fontenot. "Mission Command: An old idea for the 21st Century." *Army* 61. No. 3 (2011): 66, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/855815514?accountid=322> (accessed 14 March 2013).

and disadvantages. Mission command was listed as the “preferred concept of command and control.”¹⁵ The essence and importance of mission command continues with the publication of *Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) / Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0 Mission Command* published in 2012.

General Dempsey’s white paper on mission command was published the same year. This document notes that the challenges and vulnerabilities associated with operating in a technologically advanced environment necessitate a new outlook on how we operate.¹⁶ As a result, the joint force must utilize the philosophical concepts of mission command to enable success in times of degraded communications while still maintaining the ability to decisively mass combat power.¹⁷ In other words, mission command is the ideal command philosophy for operational level commanders to utilize for countering threats in a complex environment even without the advantage of technology. As mission command is adopted within the joint force how will certain approaches to implementing mission command by different services influence emerging joint doctrine?

Current approaches to defining Mission Command (The US Army):

Of all the services, the Army’s adoption of mission command is the most extensive. In 2011, the Army released *Field Manual (FM) 3-0, change 1*. One of the most significant changes was the removal of the C2 warfighting function (WFF) in place of mission command.¹⁸ The main argument against C2 is the pervading thought that it is too network

¹⁵ FM 6-0, *Mission Command*, 1-14.

¹⁶ Dempsey, “Mission Command White Paper,” 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸ Robert L. Caslen. “Change 1 to FM 3-0: The Way the Army Fights Today.” *Military Review* 91, no.2 (2011): 84, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/860332380?accountid=322> (accessed 15 May 2013).

centric and not commander focused; mission command is felt better suited to address these issues.¹⁹ However, C2 is still a valid concept within current joint doctrine. It is defined as:

the exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned and attached forces. C2 functions are performed through an arrangement of personnel, equipment, communications, facilities, and procedures employed by a commander in planning, directing, coordinating and controlling forces and operations in the accomplishment of the mission.²⁰

Hence, C2 gives an operational commander authority and control over assigned or attached forces during the conduct of an operation. Dr. Milan Vego notes that command is the legal authority one executes over assigned forces based on rank and position to direct forces against specific missions. Control allows a commander to synchronize the efforts of subordinates through established limits and a command structure. A commander can execute C2 in either a decentralized or centralized manner depending on one's circumstances.²¹ Defined in this manner the concept of C2 is both relevant and valid. Yet, despite its relevance, the Army removed the concept of C2 for reasons of its growing association with micromanagement and network centric capabilities and replaced it with mission command. Many critics of C2 argue that it is too structured, controlling and prohibits initiative amongst subordinates.²²

Interestingly, another noticeable absence from the Army's current mission command doctrine is the concept of detailed command. Detailed command, in short, is a more centralized form of C2 utilized in certain conditions. As FM 6-0 stated, "in practice no commander relies on purely detailed or purely mission command techniques."²³ Despite the

¹⁹ Ibid, 86-87.

²⁰ Chairman, US Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. Joint Publication (JP) 1-02 (Washington, DC: CJCS, November 2010), 49, accessed 10 March 2013. http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf.

²¹ Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, X-19.

²² Conley, "Operationalizing Mission Command,," 33.

²³ FM 6-0, *Mission Command*, 1-16.

Army's removal of this more centralized form of C2, General Dempsey speaks to the need to balance the approach to mission command. As he notes, mission command is a concept which calls for judgment in application. An operational or joint force commander may deem it necessary to apply a centralized form of C2. A commander's level of skill and education will provide the framework from which to apply supervision.²⁴

Publishing *ADP 3-0 Unified Land Operations* in 2011, the Army reaffirmed mission command's importance by stating that Unified Land Operations (ULO) is "guided" by mission command. ULO is the Army's "basic warfighting doctrine and is the Army's contribution to unified action."²⁵ The subsequent release of *ADP/ADRP 6-0 Mission Command* solidifies the Army view of mission command not only as a philosophy but also as a WFF in lieu of C2. The Army defines a WFF as a "group of tasks and systems (people, organizations, information, and processes) united by a common purpose that commanders use to accomplish missions."²⁶ The Army WFFs are identical to the joint functions with the exception of the Army's removal of C2 in favor of mission command.²⁷ Staff tasks under the mission command WFF are to conduct the "operations process, knowledge management and information management, inform and influence activities, and cyber electromagnetic activities."²⁸

Furthermore, Army doctrine lists five additional tasks residing within the mission command WFF: "conduct military deception, conduct civil affair operations, install, operate

²⁴ Dempsey, "Mission Command White Paper," 6-7.

²⁵ U.S. Army, *Unified Land Operations*, Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 3-0 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, October 2011), iii, 1, accessed 22 April 2013. <https://armypubs.us.army.mil/doctrine/index.html>.

²⁶ U.S. Army, *Mission Command*, Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, May 2012), 1-4, accessed 4 March 2013. <https://armypubs.us.army.mil/doctrine/index.html>.

²⁷ Chairman, US Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Joint Operations*. Joint Publication (JP) 3-0 (Washington DC: CJCS, August 2011), III-1, accessed 10 March. http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jointpub_operations.htm

²⁸ ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 1-4.

and maintain the network, conduct airspace control, and conduct information protection.”²⁹

With these changes Army doctrine emphasizes that mission command is more than philosophy; it is now a system that arranges: “personnel, networks, information systems, processes and procedures, and facilities and equipment that enable commanders to conduct operations.”³⁰ Put into perspective, by establishing mission command as a WFF, this concept is quickly being associated with technological platforms and systems in contradiction to its origins.

The Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) recently released the Army Capstone Concept which articulates the role of the Army as a member of the joint force to achieve directed objectives moving into the future.³¹ This publication also discusses the pivotal role mission command will play for the future Army. The language used in this document clearly indicates that the Army views mission command as more than a philosophical mindset. It lists key aspects of mission command’s capabilities as enabling decisive action in the execution of ULO through the ability to leverage a “cyber electromagnetic activities advantage to deny, disrupt, degrade, or destroy enemy cyber and electromagnetic warfare capabilities.”³² Furthermore, for successful execution of ULO (which is guided by mission command) the Army requires a “coherent and integrated network of... mission command applications... that are part of a joint cyber-infrastructure.”³³ The association of mission command to technology is pervading current thought and doctrine.

²⁹ Ibid, 1-5.

³⁰ ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 1-5.

³¹ U.S. Army, *TRADOC PAM 525-3-0. The Army Capstone Concept*. (Fort Eustis, VA: Headquarters Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), December 2012), 1, accessed 10 May 2013. <http://www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/pams/tp525-3-0.pdf>.

³² Ibid., 27.

³³ Ibid., 28.

This is different from the view of mission command which demands that leaders at all levels of war prepare to make decisions with reduced situational awareness.³⁴ Some have taken the Army to task for this declaring that the Army acts as if technology and mission command are tied together. As a result, mission command may soon find itself being associated with micromanagement at the expense of its philosophical roots.³⁵ The Army's overall approach to mission command seems to indicate that the previously discussed negatives associated with C2 may quickly become associated with mission command. Based on the effort put into Army doctrine regarding mission command it is reasonable to argue that this may, in fact, influence emerging service and joint doctrine. Specifics of this particular approach contradict the philosophical nature of mission command.

United States Marine Corps (USMC) Approach to Mission Command:

While not nearly as extensive as the Army, USMC doctrine defines a form of decentralized C2. Utilizing the term "Mission Command and Control" the USMC doctrine recognizes war's nature. As a result, mission command and control with its decentralized nature, reduces the level of certainty needed for mission accomplishment. Success is enabled by overall knowledge of the larger objectives and not by dictating how to accomplish specified missions. The USMC describes mission command and control as requiring brief orders, communication, and mutual understanding and trust to execute with little, if any, information and guidance.³⁶

³⁴ Dempsey, "Mission Command White Paper," 7.

³⁵ Donald E. Vandergriff. "Misinterpretation and Confusion: What is Mission Command and can the US Army Make it Work?" Arlington, VA: The Institute of Land Warfare, Association of the US Army. 2013. <http://www.ausa.org/publications/ilw/DigitalPublications/Documents/lwp94/index.html> , 4.

³⁶ U.S. Marine Corps, *Command and Control*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 6 (Washington, DC: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 1996), 79.

Like the US Army, the USMC believes mission command is the preferred command philosophy. For instance, Art Corbett, of the Marine and Naval concepts branch at Marine Corps Concept Development Center (MCCDC) Integration Division G3/5, notes that the USMC foundational doctrinal manual, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, is imbued with a sense of mission command's philosophical nature and its supporting qualities to maneuver warfare theory.³⁷ In contrast to the Army approach to institutionalizing mission command, the USMC appears to put more emphasis on the philosophy of mission command rather than closely aligning this concept with technology.

In analyzing mission command, Art Corbett argues that this concept is not a function so much as it is fundamental. It is a philosophy that should influence how commanders at all levels view leadership.³⁸ Indeed, for this philosophy to thrive it matters more on the commander to have the fortitude to incur calculated risk and trust subordinate units than try to make the uncertain, certain.³⁹ He goes on to note that, despite advances in technology, war is shaped by human will and not technology.⁴⁰ The problems of war are human ones and the philosophy to guide C2 must account for the uncertain, complex aspects of war.⁴¹ This humanistic view of war is certainly in line with the philosophical mission command.

Current Joint Doctrine and Mission Command:

Current joint doctrine defines mission command as “the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based upon mission type orders.”⁴² JP 3-0 adds to the above definition by stating, “ Successful mission command demands that subordinate

³⁷ Art Corbett. “Mission Command.” <https://www.nwdc.navy.mil/ncoi/mis/Briefs/Corbett%20-%20Mission%20Command%20document.pdf>, 1.

³⁸ Ibid., 2.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁴¹ Ibid., 6.

⁴² JP 1-02, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 187.

leaders at all echelons exercise disciplined initiative and act aggressively and independently to accomplish the mission.”⁴³ In addition, this publication describes mission command as being an integral part of the C2 function, enabling units to achieve their objectives despite technological degradation.⁴⁴ Put another way, the philosophy of mission command enables successful mission accomplishment. Technology is a tool of the commander, but is not required to conduct successful mission command. As it stands now, joint doctrine recognizes mission command’s utility on the modern battlefield.

Recently the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff introduced the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2020* (CCJO). This is a significant document in that it will no doubt shape emerging joint doctrine. Described within the CCJO is the role the joint force will play within the concept of Global Integrated Operations (GIO). GIO is the concept of integrating both joint and other forces across boundaries to integrate capabilities to accomplish objectives in future security environments. Mission command is listed as a key element of GIO.⁴⁵

As is stated in the CCJO, mission command must be viewed in the realities of the information age we live in along with the vulnerabilities that technology brings.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the increasing capability of digital technology allows commanders to exercise mission command in new ways.⁴⁷ The CCJO goes on to say that, despite these advantages, the joint force must not become complacent. The potential for an adversary to threaten or degrade networked systems is a real threat and preparing to operate in degraded conditions is

⁴³ JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, II-2.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Chairman, US Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2020*. (Washington, DC: CJCS, September 2012), 4, accessed 10 May 2013. <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA568490>.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5.

essential for success.⁴⁸ This degraded scenario is exactly the situation in which the philosophical aspects of mission command thrive. Operating in line with the philosophy of mission command an operational or joint force commander relies on subordinate commanders to accomplish their assigned objectives in times of degraded communications. Just as the CCJO describes the role technology will play, it also clearly indicates that commanders must prepare to operate in degraded states without the advantage of technology. By closely aligning mission command with technology, a contradiction of the philosophical nature of this concept emerges and leads to some troubling implications.

Implications of Associating Mission Command with Technology:

As mission command is formally adopted, the joint force must carefully avoid the association that successful mission command relies on technology. The danger of establishing this concept as a function implies a dependent relationship between the two. For example, some suggest the concept of mission command “depends upon net-centric capabilities and cyber security.”⁴⁹ Interpreting the Army’s approach to defining mission command they appear to argue that mission command is more than theory and decentralized execution in the vein of Auftragstaktik.⁵⁰

Others have introduced new terminology identifying the close linkage of technology to mission command. One assertion is that mission command is “tied to specific applications running across the U.S. Army’s evolving network.”⁵¹ Others have written about the introduction of new mission command technologies which produce new challenges for the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁹ Kenneth A. Lenig. “Enabling Mission Command through Cyber Power.” (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, Strategy Research Project, 2011), <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA552907>, 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁵¹ Scott R. Gourley. “Mission Command Applications 'Ebb and Flow' with Army's Network.” *Army* 63, no. 3 (2013): 31, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1318940445?accountid=322> (accessed 3 April 2013).

commander based on the massive amounts of information they produce thereby tethering a commander to their operations center. The implication here is that a commander assumes risk by leaving a command post to move forward on the battlefield.⁵² As a result, new systems such as the “mission command on the move” (MC OTM) have emerged which provide the command technologies and applications to enable commanders to negotiate the battlefield from ground or air platforms to conduct mission command.⁵³ This implies that mission command requires these technologies for successful execution.

Current trends indicate that mission command is quickly being thought of as technologically dependent and network oriented as opposed to a philosophy based on theory. There is a danger in this association. As Milan Vego points out, implying that military theory is irrelevant because of the rise of technological platforms is troubling. The human aspect is vitally more important than the technological aspect of winning wars.⁵⁴ The philosophy of mission command accounts for the intangibles of human nature.

Technology can provide significant advantages to an operational level commander. While the ability to communicate across domains is significant, the argument that successful execution of mission command depends on technological platforms has flaws. Some point out that while technology can produce enormous amounts of data and information, these systems do not possess the human qualities which enable rapid, intuitive decisions necessary in war.⁵⁵ Mission command’s philosophical basis is specifically suited towards the dynamics of human abilities. Additionally, some note that despite the advantages of technology to

⁵² Michael S. Higginbottom and Richard Adkinson. At the tip of the Spear: Mission Command on the Move in a Networked Force." *Army* 62, no. 7 (2012): 32-33, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1024133898?accountid=322> (accessed 3 April 2013).

⁵³ Ibid., 34-36.

⁵⁴ Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, XIII-49-50.

⁵⁵ Eitan Shamir. *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the US, British, and Israeli Armies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 2011), 15.

process information, the intricacies of these systems are negated by limitations of the human mind to synthesize that same information; massive technological systems also introduce a host of other problems such as maintaining the platforms when they fail.⁵⁶

Technology can produce an almost insatiable need for information, reducing the speed at which operational level decisions are made. For example, during the Vietnam War executing certain operations took months from approval to execution as a result of the incessant need for more information.⁵⁷ Associating mission command with technological dependence de-values the maneuver warfare like attributes of this concept. Martin Van Creveld, a prominent writer on military history, strategy and future warfare, notes that against a less technologically enabled threat, enemies such as the Viet Cong maintained a distinct advantage. Advances in communications and the corresponding need for more information impeded the decision making process, which is hardly sufficient to maintain the initiative against such an adversary.⁵⁸

Some critics argue that the military still experiences this problem. They note that, despite profound success on the maneuver towards Baghdad during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the operational and strategic levels of command were hindered by their reliance on situational awareness platforms. Despite the abilities of these technologies to produce relevant information, much of that information was not shared and, therefore, was of little use to subordinate commanders.⁵⁹ They also contend that instead of out-maneuvering the enemy in the spirit of mission command, a reliance on technology and fire power by operational commanders caused them to argue for operational pauses so the Air Force could

⁵⁶ Ibid., 13-14.

⁵⁷ Martin Van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1985), 249.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 251.

⁵⁹ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 139.

strike targets at the first sign of trouble.⁶⁰ In all fairness, others would disagree with this. They point out that elements of 3rd Infantry Division felt empowered to use initiative, seizing terrain beyond what had been directed. The operational commander knew this was happening while watching friendly icons move across a computer screen removed from the battle. To the extent that subordinate commanders felt empowered to continue their maneuver was a result of trust and understanding between the operational and tactical commanders.⁶¹ It was not because of digital systems far removed from the scene of action. As General Dempsey notes, mission command must be realized in the realities of the technological age in which we operate. That bit of guidance speaks to the importance of balancing the approach to defining mission command.

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Joint doctrine must establish the framework from which operational and joint task force commanders exercise mission command as a form of C2. Taking the approach of establishing mission command as a function to institutionalize this concept leads to contradicting the philosophical nature of this concept. Advocates of network centric warfare will seize the opportunity to align a theoretical concept such as mission command with technological innovations.

Operational level commanders do not require networked applications to effectively conduct mission command. They are powerful tools, which utilized effectively provide advantages, but the idea that reliance on these systems is necessary to conduct mission command is problematic. Effective mission command relies upon the same fundamental, philosophical concepts that enabled initial success for the German Army during WWII. As

⁶⁰ Ibid., 138.

⁶¹ Fontenot, "Mission Command," 68.

some point out, despite superior abilities to communicate and maintain situational awareness, the study of history and commanders successes and failures is vitally more important to the adoption of mission command than the number of information systems at one's disposal.⁶² Therefore, the following serves as recommendations for how the joint force should view mission command moving into the future.

First, mission command should be understood as a philosophy of command. While technology plays a role in the way the US military fights wars, the joint force must adhere to the basic tenants of mission command rather than endangering the philosophical nature of this concept by associating it with technology. Mission command is exceedingly more powerful as a philosophical mindset than as a function to replace C2. As mission command pervades joint doctrine and thought, the philosophical aspects of intent, mission orders, initiative, trust, and acceptance of prudent risk must be emphasized for successful execution.⁶³

In addition, detailed command (or a centralized version of C2) must remain in the doctrinal lexicon. Despite detailed command's removal from current Army doctrine, this concept is still supported by emerging guidance for the joint force. As the CCJO notes, mission command is the preferred command philosophy but might not be appropriate at times. Certain activities require a more centralized approach to command. For example, these may entail the application of national capabilities where synchronization of finite resources requires tight control.⁶⁴ This implies that mission command is a method to execute C2, but does not supplant the function of C2. The philosophy of command an operational commander chooses to execute C2 over assigned forces depends on various factors. For

⁶² Keithly and Farris, "Auftragstaktik or Directive Control," 123.

⁶³ ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 2-1.

⁶⁴ CJCS, *CCJO*, 5.

instance, rather than thinking of mission command as all or nothing, this concept should be thought of as a spectrum; exactly where one falls on this spectrum depends entirely on the specific situation facing that commander.⁶⁵ As one author points out, a joint force commander must move between different C2 styles either adopting a more centralized or decentralized style depending on the situation.⁶⁶

Finally, joint doctrine must continue to maintain C2 as a joint function and avoid the approach of establishing mission command in its place. The Army should follow suit and re-establish the C2 function. C2 states who has command authority, what command structure is in place and to what degree that commander has control over assigned forces. To the extent that C2 is thought of as too structured, network centric and micro managerial is a fault of the organization. As some argue, control is not a bad thing. Commanders must establish some forms of controls to avoid overconfidence by their subordinates. A system of checks and balances is required.⁶⁷ Perhaps even more importantly, control allows a commander to prevent the larger effort from being desynchronized.

Ultimately, however, the operational level commander, within a supporting framework of doctrine, assumes the pivotal role in establishing the conditions for successful execution of mission command as a form of C2. The operational or joint force commander must encourage mission command and not allow the abilities of senior leaders, through technology, to degrade this philosophy. In other words, the operational commander is to

⁶⁵ Conley, "Operationalizing Mission Command," 34.

⁶⁶ Robert M. Trabuchhi, *The Exercise of Control by Joint Force Commanders* (Fort Leavenworth, US: US Army Command and General Staff College, School of Advanced Military Studies. 2006), 24.

⁶⁷ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 18.

enable subordinates to do their jobs and prevent interference from strategic level decision makers.⁶⁸

In an era where technology allows senior commanders to view subordinates in the conduct of their missions, operational commanders must instill in their subordinates that they have the latitude to act in line with the overall intent, knowing that whatever decision is made is supported. This type of mission command environment will occur because of the guiding principles of mission command, not as a result of technological innovations.⁶⁹ As some point out, war is chaotic and dynamic. The role of information technologies will make it more so simply by the amount of information that is generated and shared. The best solution, despite these technological advancements, is to decentralize to those at the point of decision and defer to their judgment.⁷⁰

FINAL REMARKS

The associated advantages of technology are critical tools on the modern battlefield, and the intent of this paper is not to imply otherwise. Rather, the intent of this paper is to argue that successful execution of mission command requires leaders to act in the absence of these systems. Aligning mission command too closely with technology contradicts the theoretical nature of this concept. As Clausewitz noted, the information one gathers in war can often be inaccurate.⁷¹ Uncertainty will never be completely reduced; mission command properly understood and in the hands of capable commanders is uniquely suited for this environment.

⁶⁸ Storr, "A Command Philosophy," 124.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 124.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 126.

⁷¹ Karl Von Clausewitz. *On War* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1968), 75.

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